PROSPECT; *or, View of the Moral World.*

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Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 22 *and* 23.

THERE are two paſſages in theſe two chapters which merit ſome attention before we proceed farther. The firſt is, "Thou ſhalt not revile the gods, nor curſe the ruler of thy people." The ſecond is, "And in all things be circumſpect; and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth." The religion of the Jews was founded upon the principle of monotheiſm, or the belief in one god, and this god not of a very good character. In this firſt paſſage, however, it is ſaid, "thou ſhalt not revile the gods." What gods? not Jewiſh gods for they had but one; theſe gods, therefore, muſt have been the gods of other nations, and the prohibition mentioned here againſt diſreſpect ſeems to include a kind of ſilent approbation of the character and power of theſe divinities. If theſe were Jewiſh gods then the Jews were Polytheiſts; if they were foreign gods, perhaps the Jews went upon the old maxim of being at leaſt civil to all, becauſe they did not know whoſe hands they might fall into. The latter clauſe of this verſe ſays, "thou ſhalt not curſe the ruler of thy people. Good character, good principles, and uſeful actions, are the only qualities which ought to ſcreen rulers from popular execration. The tyrannical monarchs of the old world, who have constantly robbed man of his liberty, deſerve nothing better than the curſes of the human race. Theſe priviledged villains, theſe uſurping tyrants, have destroyed, as far as their power extended, all ſcience, virtue, and human happineſs. Is it to theſe monſters in human ſhape, that this prohibitory declaration relates?—This paſſage contains two very bad principles, or, more correctly ſpeaking, one bad principle reſpecting two important ſubjects. It forbids all inquiry into the character and conduct of beings either natural

or ſupernatural. Now ſince it is obvious that all theological conceptions have been mingled with the fallicies and whimſical conceits of the human imagination, it follows that the characteriſtick deſcriptions which have been tranſmitted from former ages, concerning beings either human or divine, ought to be ſubjected to a rigorous ſcrutiny of the human understanding. The book which forbids the exerciſe of this right denounces truth as dangerous, and places an unqualified ſanction upon vice, upon bad character, and all the long train of conſequential miſeries naturally ariſing from corrupt eſtabliſhments. The paſſage in the twenty third chapter forbids making uſe of the name of any other gods. Here even ſilent reſpect ſeems to be prohibited; in the former caſe there was a diſtant, ſilent, and implied reſpect admitted to be the juſt right of other gods beſide the Jewiſh Jehovah. What the writer meant by this kind of theological confuſion nobody know; nor is it of much conſequence to know only that it proves that the bible was not dictated by divine wiſdom, nor by any other kind of wiſdom that is of the leaſt uſe to mankind.

Theological Enquieries continued.

It is evident that the inventors of this doctrine had the ſame end in view, with thoſe others who invented correſpondencies and the interpretation of dreams: namely, to form it into a trade or craft for the mutual benefit of the concerned: though ſome good people have been ſurpriſed that there ever ſhould exiſt ſuch villainy as to impoſe upon mankind by falſifying the divine being, and making God as it were acceſſary to their crimes: To which it may be anſwered, that this ſpecies of villainy proceeds from a moſt accurſed principle, which never was more prevalent than now, namely, "That ſuch is the perverſe nature of man, that ſo prone is he to do evil that it is neceſſary to deceive him in order that he may be perſuaded to purſue his own good." Let a man's mind

be poſſeſſed of this principle, and add to it talents and opportunity, and he will not heſitate to raiſe his fortune and power by taking ſacriligious liberties with the character of the Supreme Intelligence.

Having got poſſeſſion of ſome of thoſe books, and having reſerved to themſelves the interpretation of them, they began to teach the world doctrines ſuited to their own views and intereſt, all of which will be examined in due time, by the eye of reaſon and the ſtandard of nature. It was unfortunate for mankind that there ſhould be ſo many books (written in different centuries, and by men of contrary ſentiments) exhibited to the world as the will of God, and holding out, as theſe books do, the character of the deity in ſo many different points of view; ſometimes as a ſanguinary tyrant, who cannot be ſatisfied but by blood and ſacrifices, and every ſpecies of abſurd formality;—at other times, as a kind beneficent being, who held ſacrifices, new moons, and the moſt ſolemn meetings as an abomination:—At one time declaring himſelf the god of Abraham, Iſaac and Jacob, and afterwards profeſſing to be the god of the whole earth. In one book iſſuing a decree that the children ſhall bear the ſins of their fathers even to the third and fourth generation, and in another repealing that law. when it became diſagreeable to the people, and they had made uſe of a taunting proverb concerning it, viz. "The fathers have eaten ſour grapes, and the childern's teeth are ſet on edge by it," Jer. 21, 29. Theſe contradictions could not fail to cauſe diſpute, but they have done more, they have been the cauſe of bloody and deſtructive wars, which have not only diſgraced religion, but human nature, and put back the age of reaſon for many centuries. This was an accident, however, that was unavoidable, for the Jews had from a national pride, and by univerſal conſent, conſecrated all their ancient books that were ſaved after their return from Babylon, and the firſt Chriſtians, however willing they might be, had not ſufficient authority to bring in queſtion the fact of their inſpiration.

Towards the end of the age of oracles, and the com-

mencement of the age we are now ſpeaking of, which may be termed the age of ſcripture belief, every thing written in the ancient Hebrew tongue, was ſought after with wonderful avidity. It was a mania that poſſeſſed the world at that time, as antique medals and pictures have done at other periods: they ſought for them as for hidden treaſure, and every fragment which could be riſqued from obſcurity and the teeth of time, was conſidered of ineſtimable value. It was the ſame with any Greek epiſtle or fragment that in the ſlighteſt manner mentioned the name of Jeſus Chriſt or his diſciples. This mania laſted for ſeveral centuries, during which time the ſcriptures, or manuſcripts which they called the word of God, were growing in the bulk and matter for diſputation. Forgeries of epiſtles and goſpels in Greek were numerous;—thoſe in Hebrew were fewer, becauſe not many underſtood that language; beſide there were more ſcripture already in the Hebrew, than ſuited the doctrines which the firſt chriſtians were anxious to eſtabliſh. For a long time therefore it was the wiſh of many that ſeveral of the Hebrew's book were out of the ſacred catalogue, it was found ſo difficult to make them bend to the new opinions.

When the age of ſcripture-belief was in its full; and the people as ignorant as could be wiſhed by deſigning men, a council was called who took upon them to determine upon the validity of the laſt will and teſtament of Almighty God. By this council ſeveral of the books were deprived of their ſacred character; but whether the true or the forged is uncertain.

From that period the teachers and the taught have been equally deceiving and deceived; we do not therefore charge any chriſtians of the preſent day with preaching a falſe doctrine on purpoſe to deceive; but we ſay of them as Charles V Emperor of Germany ſaid of Luther and Calvin—they are ſeduced by their own opinions, and that ther own intereſt, coupled with that moſt abominable of all principles mentioned above, namely, that

men muſt be deceived for their own good, cauſes them to deſpiſe the dictates of reaſon, and aſſiſt in perpetuating the deception.

To be continued.

The Confederacy of the Storks, with the Moral Application, taken from John Stewart's Moral World.

In an extenſive plain on the deſerts of Tartary inhabited various flocks of ſtorks; this plain was interſected by various pools of water, which were poſſeſſed excluſively by a particular flock; as this climate is ſubject to much drought, it affected much theſe pools, as their fiſh diminiſhed in proportion to the want of water. To remedy this evil, the more numerous flocks of ſtorks formed channels with their beaks to draw the water from the pools poſſeſſed by the ſmaller flocks. The waters thus communicating left dry the leſſer pools, and inundated the larger, which left the former with no fiſh or aliment, and the inhabitants in a ſtate of inanity and famine: the latter requiring a redundancy of water, became too deep for the bill of the ſtorks to reach the bottom, and they fell into the ſame ſtate of inanity and famine; but not knowing the cauſe, they continued their noxious labour, even to deprive themſelves of all ſports and paſtime, and the plain became covered with the bodies of famiſhed ſtorks.

It happened, however, that a ſtork impelled by his own ſufferings, and compaſſion for thoſe of his fellows, took an elevated flight in the air to ſeek a remedy, by removing to another part of the plain from this poſition; while he viewed the plain he obſerved the noxious occupation of various flocks, who were ſcooping out with painful labour the channels of communication with their beaks; he immediately deſcended, and expoſed to the different flocks the baneful effects of their labour: upon

this a general council was held, and the result was to eſtabliſh an univerſal confederacy, that might open ſuch regulated channels of communications as would keep the water in a juſt equilibre in all the pools, and reſtore an eaſy and happy ſubſiſtence to the flocks of the plain.

The moral of this fable is ſimple, and its application clear and inſtructive; nations purſuing a moſt inceſſant and deſtructive labour, which annihilates joy and pleaſure, and brutalizes the mind, open ſuch unmeaſured channels of commerce and policy, that cauſes inanity to the weak, and letiferous luxury to the ſtrong, and the happineſs of life, the aliment or fiſh in the fable, is annihilated by the drought, and overwhelmed or unattainable in the redundancy of water or riches, and teaches that the preſent miſery of the world can be remedied only by an univerſal confederacy, which may turn the paſſions into a channel, influenced by the great maſs of accumulated wiſdom, to procure, by the powerful energy of univerſal co-operation, the happineſs of all ſenſitive nature.

Profession of Faith from Rousseau, continued.

I will treaſure up your diſcourſe in my heart, and meditate thereon. If, when I have duly weighed it, I am as much convinced as you, I will truſt you as my apoſtle, and will be your proſelyte till death. Go on, however, to inſtruct me: you have only informed me of half what I ought to know. Give me your thoughts of revelation, the ſcriptures, and thoſe myſterious doctrines, concerning which I have been in the dark from my infancy, without being able to conceive or believe them, and yet not knowing how either to admit or reject them.

Yes, my dear child, ſaid he, I will proceed to tell you what I think farther: I meant not to open to you my heart by halves; but the deſire which you expreſs to be

informed in these particulars was necessary to authorise me to be totally without reserve. I have hitherto told you nothing but what I thought might be useful to you, and in the truth of which I am most firmly persuaded. The examination which I am now going to make, is very different; presenting to my view nothing but perplexity, mysteriousness, and obscurity: I enter on it, therefore, with distrust and uncertainty. I almost tremble to determine about any thing; and shall rather inform you, therefore, of my doubts than of my opinions. Were your own sentiments more confirmed, I should hesitate to acquaint you with mine; but in your present sceptical situation, you would be a gainer by thinking as I do. Let my discourse, however, carry with it no greater authothan that of reason; for I plainly confess myself ignorant, whether I am in the right or wrong. It is difficult indeed, in all discussions, not to assume sometimes an affirmative tone: but remember that all my affirmations, in treating these matters, are only so many rational doubts. I leave you to investigate the truth of them; on my part, I can only promise to be sincere,

You will find my exposition treat of nothing more than natural religion: it is very strange that we should stand in need of any other! By what means can I find out such necessity? In what respect can I be culpable, for serving God agreeably to the dictates of the understanding he hath given me,—and the sentiments he hath implanted in my heart? What purity of morals,—what system of faith useful to man,—or honourable to the Creator, can I deduce from any positive doctrines, that I cannot deduce from as well without it, from a good use of my natural faculties? Let any one shew me what can be added, either for the glory of God, the good of society, or my own advantage, to the obligations we are laid under by nature; let him shew me what virtue can be produced from an new worship, which is not also the consequence of mine. The most sublime ideas of the Deity are inculcated by reason alone. Take a view of the works of nature, listen to the voice

within, and then tell me what God hath omitted to ſay to your ſight, you conſcience, your underſtanding? Where are the men who can tell us more of him than he thus tells us of himſelf? Their revelations only debaſe the Deity, in aſcribing to him human paſſions. So far from giving us enlightened notions of the ſupreme being, their particular tenets, in my opinion, give us the moſt obſcure and confuſed ideas. To the inconceivable myſteries by which the Deity is hid from our view, they add the moſt abſurd contradictions. They ſerve to make man proud, perſecuting, and cruel: inſtead of eſtabliſhing peace on earth, they bring fire and ſword. I aſk myſelf to what good purpoſe tends all this, without being able to reſolve the queſtion. Artificial religion preſents to my view only the wickedneſs and miſeries of mankind.

I am told, indeed, that revelation is neceſſary to teach mankind the manner in which God would be ſerved; as a proof of this, they bring the diverſity of whimſical modes of worſhip which prevail in the world; and that without remarking that this very diverſity ariſes from the whim of adopting revelations. Ever ſince men have taken it into their heads to make the deity ſpeak in their own way, and ſay what they like beſt. Had they liſtened only to what the Deity hath ſaid to their hearts, there would have been but one religion on earth.

It is neceſſary that the worſhip of God ſhould be uniform: I would have it ſo. But is this a point ſo very important, that the whole apparatus of divine power was neceſſary to eſtabliſh it? Let us not confound the ceremonials of religion with religion itſelf. The worſhip of God demands that of the heart; and this, when it is ſincere, is ever uniform.

To be continued.

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